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ABSTRACT

There has been for over a century a movement for the humanization of work. The movement's two branches--a European one emphasizing worker alienation and structural change and a North American one emphasizing job enrichment--have converged somewhat as the concept of "quality of work life" (QWL) has emerged in the 1970's. Business concepts like QWL, it should be noted, are often borrowed by education. QWL has emerged at this time for many reasons, including increasing alienation, young workers' higher expectations, declining power of traditional institutions, desire for civil liberties in the workplace, and technological change. As currently defined, QWL is a broad philosophical concept with a humanistic value framework and a concern for traditional labor relations items, self-actualization, changing organizational culture, intrinsic meaning and social support, and social responsibility; QWL as a long-term process stresses participation, development, and workers' influence on their job environment. The introduction of QWL at General Motors' Tarrytown plant illustrates its positive effects. QWL's humanistic aspects make it very compatible with education, though QWL's sociotechnical aspects are not as applicable. Educational areas in which QWL might be applied include labor relations, community participation, student motivation, stress, staff development, and school decentralization. (Author/RW)

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QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE (QWL) APPLIED TO EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

There has been for over a century an increasingly visible movement for the humanization of work. This movement seems to have two branches[1] - one European and the other North American. The European movement is grounded in left-wing political philosophy and ideology - notably Early Socialism, Marxism, Syndicalism and Social Democracy. It has tended to stress worker alienation, worker control or power sharing, and structural change.[2] Specific examples would the industrial democracy project in Norway; co-determination in West Germany; worker managed enterprises in Yugoslavia; and efforts at applying kibbutz-type organizational forms in industrial settings in Israel.

The North American approach is of more recent vintage. The first conspicuous effort was the Human Relations movement stemming from the Hawthorne experiments[3] of the late 1920's and early 1930's and the writings of Elton Mayo[4]. Since then we have seen the emergence of HRD (Human Resource Development), Motivational approaches (i.e., D. McGregor, A. Maslow, F. Herzberg, et al.), the work of Kurt Lewin and his followers, and Organizational Development (O.D.). The North American approaches have tended to emphasize worker psychology, motivation, team building and job enrichment. Superstructure, profit, and private ownership have remained largely untouched (although recent arrangements between Chrysler and the UAW have some superficial similarities to German co-determination).

Exchange of ideas and the migratory habits of scholars has resulted in some convergence between European and American concepts. Cultural, historical and social differences should not, however, be overlooked. The largely British and Tavistock sociotechnical systems model associated with the work of E.Trist, F. Emery, T. Burns, Joan Woodward, Einar Thorsrud, and Hans van Beinum has been adopted as a conceptual framework by the Ontario QWL Centre. (Regarding an

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earlier comment about migratory patterns, Emery is now at the Australian National University in Canberra; Trist is at the University of Pennsylvania; and van Beinum is with York University and the Ontario QWL Centre).

QWL as a term emerged in the early 1970's as a covering concept for joint management employee efforts to deal with both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of work. R.H. Guest has described QWL as a "...quiet revolution at the work place."[5] According to Guest there ar at least four national and international study and research centres focusing on QWL (including one set up by the U.S. Federal Government) and over 450 books and articles have been published on the subject since 1975.[6] Warner Burke, a noted writer and consultant on O.D. has written in a recent article of the changes immanent in the consultant role brought about by the emergence of QWL:

> ...from the role of practitioner as working almost exclusively with management to the role of practitioner working with both managers and other persons at all organizational levels. I stated ... albeit somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that O.D. may be in the process of undergoing a name change, that is, to quality of work intervention or life. 7

The point that needs to be stressed is that QWL has become a significant social movement. It is not only academics or consultants who have embraced the concept but major leaders in government, trade unions, and large corporations. Guest cites the support given by GM and the UAW:

> In 1973, the UAW and GM negotiated a national agreement. In the contract was a brief "letter of agreement" ... Both parties committed themselves to establishing formal mechanisms, at least at top levels, for exploring new ways of dealing with the quality of work life. <u>This was the first time QWL was explicitly addressed in any major U.S. labor-management contract</u>. 9

A major architect of this movement was Irving Bluestone of the UAW. In a speech credited with launching QWL Bluestone stated its goals as follows:

> Traditionally management has called upon labor to cooperate in increasing productivity and improving the quality of the product. My view of the other side of the coin is more appropriate; namely, that management should cooperate with the worker to find ways to enhance the dignity of labor and to tap the creative resources in each human being in developing a more satisfying work life, with emphasis on worker participation in the decision-making process. 10

At this point some comments might be made on the relationship between Education and the buiness-industrial system. The fact that Education has for most of this century borrowed models and values from the business would not be very difficult to establish (and Education is not alone in this respect). Values or terms such as efficiency, economy, accountability, competition, competency, and productivity have wide currency in Education. Raymond Callahan[11] in his classic, Education and the Cult of Efficiency has detailed the history of the impact of business values on the emerging profession of school administration in the first third of the twentieth century. Educators have subsequently been exposed to the Human Relations Movement, Accountability (Lessinger[12]), O.D. (Schmuck and Miles[13]), HRD (Sergiovanni and Carver[14]), and MBO (Hostrop[15]). There is nothing sinister or negative implied by the preceding comments. Business is the paramount institution of our time and culture as the Church was the paramount institution of the Middle Ages. Some of the adoptions from business have been useful and some have been very inappropriate. This writer tends to be favorably disposed towards O.D. and HRD. The chequered performance of borrowings from business does, however, warrant some caution in examining new candidates.

Let us turn now to some possible reasons for the emergence of QWL at this time.

Why has QWL emerged at this time?

In a recent edition of the Harvard Business Review, T. Mills[16] in a critical article has suggested four hypotheses for the emergence or popularity of humanistic approaches to work organization:

1. Alienation, boredom, and job dissatisfaction
2. Decreasing motivation and increasing counterproductive behavior
3. Rising expectations and declining institutions
4. Dying mechanisms and changing ideas

All of the points have to do with change - change in values and attitudes; demographic changes in age, sex distribution; and organizational and institutional inability to adapt to changing conditions. Mills cites Yankelovich's study of the new worker - younger, better educated, less attracted to the traditional work ethic, expectations of meaningful work, and corporate responsibility. Simplified and boring jobs seem to lead to alienation and counter productive behavior (i.e., absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, sabotage, alcohol and drug

abuse at work, poor workmanship, etc.). Traditional authoritative institutions seem to have lost much of their power to control social behavior. Marriage, the law, churches, schools, families, and political instutions do not seem to this writer to have been held in such low esteem as at this time. The final area of Mills' hypotheses deals with the adaptability and flexibility of bureaucratic organizations.

Another sign of the times is a recent work by David Ewing of the Harvard Business School entitled Freedom Inside the Organization: Bringing Civil Liberties to the Workplace.[17] This text develops the notion that the newest rights battleground is the work situation. He attacks what is termed the "outmoded law of employer chauvinism."[18] Ewing points out elsewhere in the work that the notion of economic man has done more to stimulate unrest and opposition to management than either communism or socialism. Ewing concludes that having won rights in the legal, political, and social arenas that the time is ripe for bringing rights into the workplace. He suggests rights of fee speech, criticism, due process, and restrictions on invasions of privacy.

Emery and Trist have developed models of environmental complexity. Their typology is a continuum from simple to complex and uncertain. Our present situation is described as the "turbulent environment". This is a situation characterized by enormous organizations and organization sets; deep interdependencies between economic and other types of organizations; increasing reliance on science and research which in turn generate an increasing rate of change and heterogeneity; and more rapid modes of communication, transportation, and information processing. The increased complexity seems to create added uncertainty and unpredictability. If Ashby's law of requisite variety[20] from the field of cybernetics is valid then only variety can absorb variety - or said differently, there are no simple solutions.

Paul Blumberg has examined a large number of studies on participatory decision making and concluded:

> There is hardly a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced or that other generally acknowledged beneficial consequences accrue from a genuine increase in worker's decision-making power. Such consistency of findings, I submit, is rare in social research. 21

To summarize, the following reasons seem to have some bearing on the emergence and support for QWL by powerful elements in industial societies:

- . alienation seems to have increased and to entail unacceptable social costs
- . the new worker thesis - younger, higher expectations, less dependent
- . the decline of the authoritative power of traditional institutions (i.e., schools, churches, family, marriage, employer prerogatives, etc.)
- . unadaptive and inflexible bureaucracies
- . civil liberties or constitutionalism in the work place (also institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, etc.)
- . legitimacy crisis in management
- . participation and co-operation as related to worker satisfaction and productivity (and perhaps a new basis for legitimacy)
- . turbulent and unpredictable environment
- . destabilizing effects of science and technological change

What is QWL?

Robert Guest, a social scientist who has done work with assembley line workers in the automobile industry and QWL has suggested the following general definition:

> "Quality of work life" is a generic phrase that covers a person's feelings about every dimension of work including economic rewards and benefits, security, working conditions, organizational and interpersonal relationships, and its intrinsic meaning in a person's life.22

Guest attempts a more specific definition:

> ...I will define QWL more specifically as a process by which an organization attempts to unlock the creative potential of its people by involving them in decisions affecting their work lives. A distinguishing characteristic of the process is that its goals are not simply extrinsic, focusing on the improvement of productivity and efficiency per se; they are also intrinsic, regarding what the worker sees as self-fulfilling and self-enhancing ends in themselves. 23

Guest tends to emphasize process dimensions of QWL. Another writer, David Nadler,[24] puts somewhat more emphasis on structural dimensions. Nadler

takes a typology of conflict resolution from the labor-management context developed by Walton and McKersie.[25] The latter identified two bargaining patterns - distributive bargaining - the rather common zero-sum, win/lose, adversarial system of labor negotiation; and the second, integrative bargaining, in which both parties seek to co-operate in projects and problem solving. Nadler seems to view QWL as a form of integrative bargaining. Nadler describes a model in which both union and management contribute members to a Quality of Work Labor Management Committee; the committee in turn employs an external consultant and external researchers; multi-level work unit committees (department, plant, total enterprise); and an ad hoc project committee which reports to the senior QW Labor-Management Committee. Finally, Nadler identifies three prerequisites for integrative bargaining: a) motivation; b) information, and c) trust.

Lippitt and Rumley offer the following definition of QWL:

> "Quality of Working Life" is a broad concept. It refers to the degree to which work provides an opportunity for an individual to satisfy a wide variety of personal needs - from the need to survive with some security to the need to interact with others, to have a sense of personal usefulness, to be recognized for achievement and to have an opportunity to improve one's skills and knowledge. 26

To the above, Lippitt and Rumley develop further work characteristics to include:

. organizational environmnet (pay, benefits, opportunity for career growth)
. physical environment (functional, comfortable, safe)
. the job itself
. social relations[27]

Trist in another article details intrinsic and extrinsic features of work. Among the extrinsic items he cites fair pay, job security, benefits, safety, health and due process; among the intrinsic factors are mentioned variety and challenge, continuous learning, discretion, autonomy, recognition, support, meaningful social contribution, and a desirable future (i.e. not necessarily promotion but a vertical career leading to greater skill development - "hope as a human right").[28]

Pulling together these various definitions what can be said?

. QWL is a broad, comprehensive general concept
. it is a philosophy with a humanistic value framework
. it is concerned with traditional items of labor negotiation (i.e., pay, benefits, safety, production, efficiency)
. it tends to downgrade the economic man model and replace it with self actualizing and complex man models
. it is concerned with changing organization culture
. it is concerned with intrinsic meaning, growth, autonomy, social support
. it is a process stressing increasing participation and development
. it is concerned with social contributions and responsibility
. it is usually a long term effort
. an essential element of QWL is the ability of individuals or groups to be able to influence their work environments

A very brief examination of the QWL process.

Guest did a study of the introduction of QWL at GM's Tarrytown plant,[29] which may become to QWL what Hawthorne was the Human Relations movement. Details of the study will not be discussed but a few highlights and facts might be mentioned. Tarrytown was perhaps the worst plant in GM's system in terms of productivity and labor relations. A state of continuous warfare seemed to be going on between the union and mangement. Management approached the union (an important point to keep in mind; generally management initiates discussions on QWL). Both sides perceived the situation as so bad that they figured "...what the hell, we have nothing to lose."[30] The situation is somewhat analogous to the alcoholic who has to hit bottom before he decides to go to AA. Management showed its good faith by asking for and using worker suggestions in redesigning part of the production process. The union leadership began to redefine their purposes as being more than 'bread and butter issues (i.e., wages, hours, job security). They began to see their task as helping workers to participate in decisions affecting their work; to be consulted; and to be concerned with broader improvement in the quality of work life.

Consultants were brought in to train workers and supervisors in problem solving and communication skills. Though sceptical at first, all parties came to appreciate the utility of an external third party. The sessions dealt with both interpersonal problems and technical problems.

Tarrytown progressed from one of the very worst plants to one of the best. Absenteeism and grievances were considerably reduced, and Guest quotes the production manager as saying:

> From a strictly production point of view - efficiency and costs - this entire experience has been absolutely positive, and we can't begin to measure the savings that have taken place because of the hundreds of small problems that were solved on the shop floor before they accumulated into big problems. 31

Union spokesmen were similarly positive and seemed convinced that participation was genuine. QWL also seemed to contribute to crisis situations during sudden problems over OPEC, overtime, and layoffs. Guest suggested a number of prerequisites to the success of QWL including (paraphrased):

- competent management
- a strong union backed by its membership
- management initiation
- not used to circumvent prevailing agreements
- commitment by management and labor
- orient and involve middle-management and supervision (the level feeling most threatened by QWL projects)
- success should not result in work-force reductions or speed up
- program should be voluntary
- limited, flexible exploratory approach rather than master plan
- immediate response and talking out of problems
- opportunities for application of skills taught
- QWL should be continuous[32]

Some translations and modifications for applications in Education.

Many of the statements made sofar probably have a rather familiar ring or are adaptable to the existing subculture in schools. Educators have for several decades been aware of environmental turbulence. Responses might be more reactive rather than proactive, but educators have certainly been trying very hard to meet public expectations whether they involved the 'whole child',

alternative schools, back-to-basics, or moral education.

The sociotechnical approach and QWL have originated in studies of economic organizations and require considerable modification to be useful to social service and people-processing organizations. At the risk of simplifying excessively, sociotechnical systems are concerned with the interaction of three systems - social, technical and economic in an environmental context. Technology probably has an enormous potential in schools some day but for various reasons this potential is not presently being used. One could come up with plausible reasons for technical retardation - teacher conservatism, sabotage, community conservatism, job protectionsim, humanistic antipathies, lack of financial resources, etc. Technology could be defined in terms of software such as curricula, teaching methods, materials, and texts. The fuzziness of output measures in comparison with the crispness and clarity of manufactured products or profits is obvious. Schools seem to be places where one category of people (called teachers) communicate or process information to a number of other people (termed students or pupils) in the hope of influencing their behavior, cognition, and values in some desirable direction. Technology does not seem to be a very useful dimension for understanding or altering the situation. Profit and productivity are also ill-fitting metaphors in the school system. It is a system in which affect and rationality, ecological arrangement and population, and community expectations are all relevant but not technology.

Several of the psychological factors which cause alienation at work are not problematical in education. The boring or very narrow task, the social deprivation, the meaninglessness of the job, the lack of social utility or responsibility, the lack of opportunities for growth and development, and the lack of autonomy are not generally deficiencies found in teaching. Teaching is potentially an intrinsically rich and satisfying form of work. Stress and burnout are more likely to be viewed as built into the teacher's job.

There are certain problems in a contracting or declining institution which need to be defined and clarified. These are problems which teachers as the day-to-day operatives know far more intimately and are much more likely to solve than outside consultants, politicians, or central office staff people.

Humanism is almost an educational invention going back not fity or a hundred years but thousands. The ideas of Plato, Confucius, and others to Francis W. Parker and John Dewey have emphasized the whole person or well rounded approaches to dealing with people. Ideologically, educators do not need very much persuasion on this issue.

It is a largely unsung story but educators have been working very much in the spirit of O.D. and HRD for a very long time. Group approaches to learning, project methods, problem solving and concern for motivation were all around when I was a child and I am sure they preceded my birth. Action research was being used by Steven Corey and Hilda Taba in the 1950's. The National Training Laboratories (NTL) which developed sensitivity training, T-groups, and other techniques was sponsored by the NEA. Education itself has come up with a number of participative, collegial, and co-operative methods or arrangements such as clinical supervision and team teaching.

Quality of Education or excellence in education have also been long term concerns.

Education has not always been pictured as up to date or innovative. In fact I would suspect that popular imagination view the schools as rather conservative and backward. However, on many of the problems addressed by QWL the schools come out quite well. They tend to be sensitive to environment and public opinion; teaching has a number of intrinsic rewards built-in; humanistic values or rhetoric, at least, seems widespread;participative and democratic methods are being used; and questions of quality are continuously being discussed. Is there anything useful to be gained by employing aspects of QWL in the schools?

<u>Some areas of possible QWL intervention</u>.

The most obvious area of possible use is that of labor-management negotiations. Not as an alternative, but as an adjunct to the present system QWL could be used in a number of situations. Teacher unions have

been a mixed blessing. There has been improvement in economic and working conditions for teachers over the past two decades after prolonged lag and neglect. There has also been, at the same time, some loss of public esteem and support. It is possible, and QWL demonstrates this, that many problems having to do with working conditions can be resolved at the work place co-operatively. With flexibility and collaboration and by utilizing teach -management groups, work can be redesigned; sticky questions having to do with class-size, paraprofessional roles, response to communites, curriculum, etc. can be dealt with more effectively. What is being suggested is that locals, however defined, should address local or particularistic concerns. Traditional union negotiations should deal with universals regarding the entire employee group; people at school X should not be hamstrung by conditions which applied at different times and places but are inappropriate or meddlesome in the present situation.

Something like QWL seems to be going on in some community schools or programs of active public participation. My own observations would lead to the view that questions of work life quality need to be made more explicit. It is time to propose a terminological change if QWL is to enter education and it is suggested the the area be called"Quality of School Life"(QSL). There seem to be some indicators that public participation may have peaked or be in fact waning (Canadian Educational Association conference on Public Participation in Education, Dec. 1980, Toronto). Certainly a consensual definition of educational quality from the community, subject to periodic review, might ameliorate one problem.

In the previous section it was pointed out that many of the factors which cause "blue collar blues" among industrial workers do not seem to be as pronounced among teachers - that in fact overload, overstimulation and too much variety seems to have created problems of stress and burnout. The factors in the industrial model, might, however, apply to students. Teachers, in many respects, share the problems of industrial managers in attempting to motivate and stimulate a recalcitrant group of workers. Students also have some feelings of alienation, meaninglessness, and exhibit hostile and anti-school behavior (i.e., vandalism, absenteeism, drug and alcohol abuse at school, rebellion, etc.). Counterproductive cycles need to be halted at some point if the organization is to survive.

Implicit in the previous discussion and QWL literature is concern with the impact of life styles or situations outside the workplace (or school). It is not meant that schools or organizations have the right to be meddlesome or interfere with the privacy of employees or students. It does mean that a recognition of away from work life styles or situations impact on the work place and vica-versa. Some organizations supply instruments and facilities for dealing with extra work issues. For example, in schools the issue of stress and burnout are much discusssed at this time. Are we really able to separate out stress which originates at home or at work? Would it not be more useful to look at the problem as an interdependent dialectic rather than two impermeable compartments of life-space? As former or present teachers we are aware that our students performance and attitudes were influenced by diet, nutrition, health, weight, self-image, sleep, interpersonal relations, and a host of factors beyond our control or knowledge. What is being said in a sense is that work and home (or non-work activities) are interdependent and interpenetrating and that some mode of examining relationships and changing behaviors be developed. Work and community can also be viewed as microcosms of the larger society and the possibilities for mutual influencing can also be taken into account.

In certain technical areas, our newly christened QSL can find some useful borrowings from QWL. Contexts such as staff development, in-service training, supervision for instructional improvement, curriculum development, and task structure are areas which QWL (and sociotechnical systems) have come up with a number of transferable techniques. Emery and Emery[33] have developed a Participative Design Workshop in which employees redesign their jobs. The Emerys point out that two-thirds of the supervisory positions tend to become redundant after redesign. Some plants have set up autonomous work groups, and group self supervision schemes which might be tried in education. All of the cited approaches imply rather radical decentralization. It would seem that if corporate management seems willing to make profit hostage and trust its blue collar employees that schools would be taking even less risk in trusting its professional employees. I do not often agree with Milton Friedman but his notions of maximizing choice and decentralization of schools seems to have some possibilities of freeing up some of the energies and talents presently being blocked in so many schools.

QSL - some suggestions

- decentralize decisions on teaching (time, grouping, material, methods) to operative levels (school,department, or class)
- provide time off, consultants, and in-service in process areas (i.e., communications, problem solving, consensus building, conflict resolution, etc.)
- joint union or staff asscciation and management committees to deal with QSL
- joint parent or community and school committees to deal with QSL
- QSL for pupils and students
- quality as an evolving localized consensus

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